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AN EVALUATION OF EXERCISES IN CIVICS TEXTBOOKS

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When civics courses are conceived of as training for the efficient performance of the activities of citizenship, what the students *do* in the courses becomes an important consideration. Since instruction in American schools is controlled in a very high degree by the textbooks employed, the exercises, such as usually occur at the ends of the chapters, determine in many instances a portion of the pupils' activities in the study period and during the recitation. It is the purpose of this paper to describe and evaluate the exercises found in a number of texts now in common use.

Ten outstanding textbooks in civics are so widely used in the high schools of the country that one or another of them is the basic text in 90 per cent of the civics courses taught in the high schools of the North Central Association.¹ Each of these textbooks supplements its text discussions with questions or exercises which may be assumed to represent what the authors conceive to be the activities proper to students in such courses.

It is probable that these "exercises" are not so closely followed by teachers as the content of the chapters they supplement. Very strong teachers are independent of them; very weak teachers may be able to make little use of them. But far the greater number of teachers depend on the exercises considerably and use them as largely as their training, facilities, and opportunities permit. So far as these teachers are concerned, the exercises may be taken to represent in scope, distribution, and relation to the objectives sought something better than general or current practice.

The writer has sought by analysis and classification of these exercises to determine the nature of the activities students of

¹ C. O. Davis, "Training for Citizenship in the North Central Association Secondary Schools," *School Review*, XXVIII, April, 1920, 263-82.

civics courses are expected to carry out and the relation of these to some outstanding phases of citizenship activity. The categories into which the exercises were classified will be more significant in the light of the following question, the effort to answer which was a dominant purpose of the study:

Is civics teaching planned to train the citizen in effective ways of keeping himself informed concerning the methods employed and the results secured by the various agencies charged with meeting the common needs of society, to the end that he may fulfil his responsibility as a citizen for exercising supervision over them; and are adequate methods employed to accomplish such plans?

A primary basis for the classification is, therefore, whether the exercises afford the pupil experience in acquiring significant current civic facts by means of observation, the use of general compendiums of social statistics and facts, official reports, and current newspapers and periodicals.

There is given in Table I the distribution of the exercises found in the several dominant textbooks, the books being designated by a letter only, as it is in no wise the purpose of this article to institute any comparison of the texts. Since two or more questions are usually grouped as one numbered "exercise," such groups have been taken as the unit in the classification, except where different parts of the group require different classification. In that case the group is counted as many units as its parts fall into different classifications. On this basis, the total number of exercises in the ten texts examined is 4,762, exclusive of some 2,000 specific reading references not here considered. It is evident that the term "unit" cannot be used here in the sense of equality of the teaching energy or of the student's time demanded by the exercise.

Several types of exercises call for no facts not to be found within the textbooks themselves. These are divided into four classes according to the use to be made of the facts—the ultimate activity required of the pupil. Other types of exercises necessitate a search for facts in sources other than the texts. These are classed according to the nature or the source of the facts. All suggestions of observation or excursions are grouped together. Definitions and examples of the classes follow.

TABLE I
PERCENTAGE OF EXERCISES OF THE SEVERAL CLASSES IN DOMINANT TEXTBOOKS*

CLASSES	TEXTBOOKS										AVERAGE
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	
I. "Study" questions.....	6.5	53.2	10.6	12.7	4.4	62.9	59.0	61.9	21.8	36.1	32.0
II. Support for text statements.....	.0	.3	.9	1.3	1.5	.7	4.7	.1	1.9	2.0	1.3
III. Applications and illustrations.....	3.0	5.1	5.0	9.2	13.9	6.8	5.2	8.2	19.9	9.7	8.6
IV. Policy or preference.....	21.3	18.5	32.7	13.0	13.9	22.8	7.5	20.0	46.1	31.4	22.7
V. Organized discussions.....	9.5	12.1	22.3	16.6	15.9	4.6	9.4	1.8	5.8	6.4	10.4
VI. Personnel, local nomenclature, etc.....	31.4	7.4	18.2	31.4	34.2	1.1	10.8	5.8	2.6	10.0	15.3
VII. Compendiums, yearbooks, etc.....	8.3	1.1	2.9	8.2	2.7	1.1	10.4	.8	1.9	1.5	3.9
VIII. Official reports, etc.....	14.8	1.8	6.5	6.3	6.5	.0	1.9	.8	.0	1.3	4.0
IX. Records of representatives, etc.....	1.2	.0	.5	.3	.0	.0	.0	.2	.0	.0	.2
X. Observation and excursion.....	4.1	.5	.6	.9	7.1	.0	.0	.3	.0	1.6	1.5

*The table should be read: Exercises of Class I ("Study" questions) constitute 6.5 per cent of the exercises in textbook A; 53.2 per cent of the exercises in textbook B; etc.

Class I.—Questions, the answers to which are to be found in the text, and the purpose of which seems to be to test the mastery of the text or to direct the study of it.

Examples: What is a public utility? A franchise? What are quasi-public corporations?

Trace a bill through Congress, showing the various stages through which it must pass before becoming a law.

It is evident that exercises like these do not provide experience which is productive of skill in self-information, except in so far as they train in habits of close reading. They seem to be merely a persistent echo of the old-time practice of casting textbooks in the form of a catechism. Their presence may even tempt teachers to devote the available time to them rather than to exercises that are inherently more difficult and require more initiative and foresight to employ.

Class II.—Questions calling for support of fairly obvious propositions or conclusions presented briefly in the text, with little or no specific support.

Example: Show how real self-government in any high school depends far more on the co-operation of students and faculty than it does on the forms of self-government.

Class III.—Questions calling for the application of principles or the illustration of general facts stated in the text.

Example: Show the growth in democracy in governmental changes of the last hundred years.

Class IV.—"Thought" questions, dealing with policy or preference, not subject to factual proof.

Example: Give some reasons why, in your judgment, senators should be elected by the people.

These classes have largely the same significance. Nothing in their nature sets the pupil upon a search for new facts; they involve either an organization of knowledge secured from the textbook or a canvass of one's experience and observation. They afford experience in relating facts and in drawing conclusions, and are pertinent to the objectives of judgment and attitude. Projects of this nature are necessary in good civics teaching, but they do not train the student in securing the current facts necessary to the supervision of social and governmental agencies.

Class V.—Questions which call for facts to be found in organized form in treatises, other textbooks, etc.

Example: Give a history of the Tenure of Office Act of 1867.

This class of exercises carries the student outside the text, causes him to read more extended discussions of topics treated there, and acquaints him with books that are standard and authoritative. They may be made the means of giving much of the historical background so essential to a full understanding of governmental forms and practices. They also familiarize the student with magazine discussions in advocacy of or opposition to social change. However, it should be noted that in general the student is presented with organized facts and conclusions and is more likely to memorize the conclusions and to accept them as the object of his reading than to feel that the facts themselves are the end of his effort.

Class VI.—Questions on current personnel, local organization, and nomenclature, current community enterprises, etc.

Examples: What is the number of the judicial district (or circuit) in which you live? What territory does it include? Name the judges.

How many members are there on your county board? Are they called commissioners or supervisors? Are they elected from the county at large or from districts?

Two large values are apparent in this class of exercises. They tend to make concrete and interesting what might otherwise be a very abstract study. They relate facts of government very intimately to the individual student. On the other hand, they are necessary to adapt and correct to local differences the general statements of a text written for use anywhere in the country. But they do not seem adapted or intended to train the pupil in getting information concerning the results secured by the officers whose names he learns.

Class VII.—Questions calling for facts of a general character, the probable source of which would be census reports, current compendiums, etc.

Examples: Make a list of the six largest cities in your state and give their population.

What was the amount of last year's appropriation for the army? For the navy? For pensions?

Class VIII.—Questions of the work, costs, and results of the various social agencies, probably involving reference to official reports.

Examples: What was the cost of public education in your city last year? What percentage of the entire municipal revenue was expended for school purposes?

Obtain a statement of the city's finances, showing receipts and expenditures. Is there a bonded debt? How is it managed? Is there a sinking fund?

Exercises of these classes tend to familiarize the student with the sources of primary facts, as little colored by unsuspected opinion as may be, sources which when used or cited are respected by the thoughtful citizen. A course marked by such exercises ought to be successful in giving the student a well-established reaction to the question "where to look" when confronted with the need of dependable facts.

Class IX.—Questions concerning the records of representatives, administrations, etc.

Examples: Compare the chief planks of the two party platforms in the last presidential election. Has the successful party fulfilled the pledges of its platform?

That such studies as these may be delicate or even dangerous must be admitted; they could easily involve the school in the charge of political activity. They ought, not only from expediency, but also from their pedagogical purpose, to be made as objective as possible. The experience to be derived from them is surely significant in citizenship training.

Class X.—Suggestions involving observation and excursions.

Examples: If possible, bring a government bond to class for examination and study.

Visit your county courthouse, and make a report on the use to which it is put.

Exercises of this category may be merely devices to secure concreteness and interest. If so, their use will not result in a maximum of alertness and effectiveness in observation of civic and social conditions. Their use and proper direction seem essential to afford the experience necessary to skilful performance of certain civic duties.

Examination of the table discloses the types of activity which predominate in present-day civics study. Two of the textbooks make almost two-thirds of the exercises mere quizzing on the wording of the related chapters; four of them devote half or more than half of the exercises to this sort of review. It is quite certain that teaching based on such books will be little more than *memoriter* text study. Only two or three of the texts can be considered as making this a minor feature, and the average for all the texts is 32 per cent.

Classes II, III, and IV together constitute almost another third and in one form or another are important features of the activity dictated by each of the books. This is natural and proper, since they seem closely related to the objectives of judgment and attitude which have been so much stressed in recent thinking concerning instruction in citizenship.

If to the foregoing classes—none of which seems to send the pupil in search of facts outside his own textbook—one adds the next class (questions which send the pupil to organized discussions of one kind or another), a very large part of the exercises is accounted for. In the average for the ten textbooks, these five classes include 75 per cent of the total.

Class VI is an important part of the whole group of the exercises in most of the texts, a very prominent part in some. Stress on community civics causes this emphasis in some of the texts, and the necessary local corrections in texts that emphasize government produce it in others.

As for the remaining classes, the conspicuous fact is their omission or near omission from most of the texts. Their neglect prompts one to believe that the ability on the part of the citizen to supervise the workings of his government and of other social instrumentalities is not a conscious objective in much of the civics teaching of today. Effort to produce that ability would almost surely lead to the use of exercises in the performance of which the student would gain familiarity with the primary sources of civic fact and experience in interpreting and evaluating the reports on which he must depend.

Examination of the textbooks leads one to much the same conclusions from two other considerations. In prefaces and in suggestions to teachers, the authors indicate rather clearly their conception of the functions of the exercises. They conceive of them as having significant value in directing the study of the texts, provoking thought, and affecting attitude, securing wider reading, training in making reports, adapting general discussions to local conditions, giving concreteness and local color to the study of civics, and otherwise quickening interest in the study. But not one of the authors expresses the idea that the exercises can be used effectively to produce skill in acquiring civic facts.

Another important sidelight is the attitude of the textbooks toward newspapers and periodicals. If the ability to keep one's self informed in current civic matters is recognized as an objective in citizenship training, the public press becomes invested with an important civic function concerning which the student should be instructed. Such instruction is conspicuously lacking in the textbooks of today. Each of the ten under study makes note of the constitutional guarantee of "freedom of speech and of the press." Six do no more. One adds a very brief comment on newspapers as a social agency for the intercommunication of ideas but with no suggestion of their civic import. Another adds a sentence of comment on the importance of the freedom of the press to a self-governing people and cites in a footnote the prevalence of libel laws and the European practice of governmental censorship. Two others add somewhat vague recommendations concerning the use of newspapers in civics courses, and one cites a specific publication as valuable in checking the records of congressmen. Only one of the ten attempts to discuss the press as a factor in our civic life, or to give the student any basis for the evaluation of newspapers or newspaper reports. This unique discussion, though valuable, is exceedingly brief.

It would seem that, while current civics textbooks are excellent in many phases, their preparation has not given adequate recognition to the conception of civics courses as training for the skilful performance of the activities which devolve on the citizen. The

administration of such training would probably be greatly furthered by the issuance of a manual of exercises, for use supplementary to any typical textbook, in which the exercises should be selected and organized on the basis of the types of activity they induce as well as the subject-matter they emphasize. Such a manual should also make clear to the teacher the range of experience appropriate to the study. This phase of social science work seems far too important to be dealt with successfully in subordinate features of textbooks. A manual of the kind suggested might effect some such change in the character of civics instruction as the laboratory manuals produced in science courses.